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Doomed to Deferral

A Case Against Tomorrow

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Look left, look right, I dwell alone ...”

The section of Mental Fight Ben Okri dedicates to what wounds civilisation has inflicted upon the world, he titled The Stoney Ground. The poet Robinson Jeffers wrote that “(w)e must unhumanize our views a little and become confident as the rocks and ocean we are made from”. Eco-phenomenologist philosopher David Abrams has written about the sensuous experience of rocks, boulders, stones and mountains, and of our experience of them.

Rocks and stones have no hopes or fears – or rather, I have no belief that they do. They are, in a day-to-day humanistic sense, timeless and ageless, outside of the dustbin of history. They are immediate and present.

Perhaps there is something to be said about being hopeless and fearless today. I might write more on this tomorrow – but I probably won’t.

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and “cruel optimism”: “(t)he anarcho-nihilist position is essentially that we are fucked” and that “... rather than deferring our rage into the future we can finally realise that now is the time we’ve been waiting for” . It appears reasonable to say that we are fucked. If we are fucked, rather than deferring our activities to the future, we can fight, create and live for today, right here, right now.

Right Here, Right Now

An anarchist writer and friend of mine, who writes under the name Flower Bomb, stated in his piece No Hope, No Future: Let The Adventures Begin! that “(t)he Future is a hologram of dreams and promises that get rejected by the present” and “(t)oday is here, right now, like a blank canvas inviting my imaginative, destructive creativity”. Flower Bomb writes of feral experience across much of their work, something I have done across my books, Feral Consciousness and Feral Iconoclasm, in various essays, and sought to share some of through The Night Forest poetry project I am part of. Feral, in eco-anarchist discourse, is a playful term, whose applied practice is presentist, creatively destructive and destructively creative, pessimistic and adventurous, and nakedly immediate, in its desire for ecology and the ecology of its desires.

The sun might rise again, but that does not mean we will have a tomorrow. Why should we have a tomorrow, or be able to write poetry for tomorrow, when 200 species become extinct each day this culture continues?

I’m not going to provide an answer today. Maybe I will tomorrow – but then again, maybe not.

In her poem A Better Resurrection, Sylvia Plath wrote –

*“I have no wit, I have no words, no tears;
My heart within me like a stone;
Is numbed too much for hopes or fears;*

Chernobyl rewilded might be beautiful,
But the irradiation is still a scar.

*“Look at history
See what you find”*

Ben Okri, we are caged by history,
Slaves to the dustbin.
History has set its ruins upon earth,
And doomed us all.

“We are living on the cusp”

Ben Okri, we were and are
Circling the drain.
We are teetering on the edge,
Collapsing into the unknown.

Yesterday's Tomorrow

Not my best poetic work, sure. What I attempted to do, in responding to Ben Okri's poem, was respond to some of his comments on the tomorrow of yesterday, that is now today, by juxtaposing the direction of the gaze. Okri's words are directed elsewhere, which is where tomorrow always is, deferred ad infinitum.

Ecological collapse, in the same way that ecology just always is, is here, today. We are living, breathing ecology. There is no deferral to ecology, as ecology is immediate.

“Tomorrow – whose location
The wise deceives
Though its hallucination
Is last that leaves” Emily Dickinson

Let's return to where we are today – doomed!

In his work on concentration camp resistance, Blessed Is The Flame, Serafini gives an anarcho-nihilist critique of futurity

If I am going to write about tomorrow, maybe I should start writing this tomorrow.

The problem then becomes: tomorrow will be today, and there will be a different tomorrow, which is when I will have to start writing. The same problem is one you reading have to confront – you can only start reading this tomorrow, if you are to read it in the proper time. Ultimately, you and I will both be doomed, if we rest our hopes on reading or writing tomorrow, but perhaps being doomed is a decent enough ending to start at.

Apocalypse Fatigue

You should probably read about tomorrow, tomorrow.

Yesterday we were doomed. We were also doomed several other yesterdays ago. A doomed yesterday might be better called a noterday, given the nihilism of doom-talk and the negativity that goes with nihilism.

Even more yesterdays ago, techno-industrial civilisation was looking at the tomorrow of the Millennium. Both transcendence and disaster were promised for tomorrow then. Maybe neither were true. Perhaps both were. The dawn of a new historical epoch and all that could signify.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the sociologist Baudrillard became infamous for stating that history had ended, with globalisation, hyper-realism and the totalitarian presence of progress. But, to quote the man himself, “(t)he end of history is, alas, also the ends of the dustbins of history ... (t)here are no longer any dustbins for disposing old ideologies, old regimes, old values”.

And here we are, in the dustbin, at the end of history, plagued by old values, regimes and ideologies – living the tomorrow no one hoped for in the Millennium.

“I never put off till tomorrow what I can possibly
do the day after” Oscar Wilde

To mark the Millennium event, Ben Okri’s poem *Mental Fight* was published in 2 parts, by *The Times* newspaper.

Poetry is a strange form of art. It is very much something you can enjoy the day after tomorrow. Poetry does not command the same authoritarian presence in space as theatre, sculpture, film, TV, music, or most other forms of artistic work. But I’d say that poetry’s power is in its lack of authority – as authoritarianism is only embraced by the most powerless groups and individuals.

Poetry is mostly a written form of art, as we encounter it in the dustbin of history – the hyper-real totality of progress. There are of course oral traditions and poets, but these, by virtue of their (lack of) form have already succeeded in escaping being captured by history, so I won’t bring them into this thought exploration.

Written language is subject to what philosopher and semiologist Derrida termed *differance*, the deferral of meaning. Action – radical, political, basically any – is often deferred to tomorrow. Tomorrow we will deal with it. Tomorrow we will get it done. Derrida’s notion of *differance* is linked to his concept of deconstruction, which speaks to the basic instability within text (something I am attempting to play with in writing this piece, as I defer from point to point).

“At night, towards dawn, all lights of the shore
have died, and the wind moves.” Jeffers

Back to Ben Okri’s poem! (If we can get back to it.)

Rather than attempting to write a (perhaps) (anti-)postmodernist essay-interpretation of a postmodernist poem in postmodern-culture (if postmodern-culture is possible), starting from the constructed work, I think that I will start

from a place of deconstruction. Most poems take a somewhat deconstructed form already, as they are written in verses or stanzas. *Mental Fight* is no different, as it is written across multiple sections, with subsequent subsections delineating lines of demarcation across the structure of his piece – my mind is, as I write this (today), instantly reminded of the logician Wittgenstein’s book *The Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (probably the most beautiful book on logic and the driest work of poetry I have ever read). Already relatively deconstructed, some of the work is already done.

I will save writing a detailed analysis of the poem for tomorrow (and allow its deferral to mean that I never write a detailed analysis of *Mental Fight*) and will, in the spirit of experimental writings, present poetic responses to dissected deconstructions of Okri’s work.

“Human kind cannot live long timeless”

Ben Okri, you are right,
But we have no time,
There is no time.
The world is dying today.
What is the fucking point in tomorrow,
If the world dies today?

“Is nature exhausted?”

Ben Okri, nature was exhausted yesterday,
Nature will be exhausted tomorrow,
As it was exhausted today.
You wrote of “dreams” and “nightmares”,
I’m alive today.

“Humanity is at its most radioactive”

Ben Okri, would you say that is still true?
Perhaps it is,
But this culture is subject to radioactive decay.